R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 016 429 56 FL 000 658

EXPERIMENTS WITH THE APPLICATIONS OF THE AUDIO-VISUAL AND AUTOMATIC DEVICES TO THE TEACHING OF FRENCH. FINAL REPORT.

BY- BURROUGHS, ELAINE L.
HOLLINS COLL., VA.

PUB DATE 28 JUN 61

GRANT OEG-7-44-106
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.24 4P.

DESCRIPTORS- *COLLEGE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS, *FRENCH, *PHONETICS, *COURSE DESCRIPTIONS, *PROGRAMED INSTRUCTION, SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, PROGRAMED TEXTS, TAPE RECORDINGS, TITLE 7, NDEA

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROGRAMED FRENCH PHONETICS COURSE FOR SECOND YEAR STUDENTS IS DESCRIBED BRIEFLY. THE COURSE EMPHASIZES ACTIVE STUDENT PARTICIPATION, IMMEDIATE REINFORCEMENT, AND PROGRESSIVE FRAMES, AND CONSISTS OF A PRINTED TEXTBOOK AND A TAPE. THE STUDENT CHECKS HIS ORAL RESPONSES WITH THE TAPE, AND HIS WRITTEN RESPONSES WITH THE PROGRAMED TEXT. THE COURSE HAS BEEN USED SUCCESSFULLY AS AN ACCOMPANIMENT TO A FIRST COURSE AND AS A REVIEW OF SOUNDS FOR STUDENTS WITH ONE OR TWO YEARS OF FRENCH. IT IS ALSO SUGGESTED FOR USE AN AN INDEPENDENT FIRST COURSE IN FRENCH PHONETICS FOR MAJORS, OR TO TRAIN FLES TEACHERS. (AF)

ED016429

FINAL REPORT TO THE COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, CONCERNING GRANT NO. 7-44-106.00, ISSUED JUNE 16, 1960, TO SUPPORT A RESEARCH PROJECT UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF TITLE VII OF THE NATIONAL DEFENSE EDUCATION ACT OF 1958 (P. L. 85-864)

Submitted by: Hollins College, Virginia

Address: Hollins College, Virginia

Telephone number: EMpire 6-7631

Initiated by: Elaine L. Burroughs, M.A.
Instructor in French, Hollins College

Transmitted by: Willard N. James, Acting President

Date: June 28, 1961

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Elaine L. Burroughs

Elaine L. Burroughs.

Willard N. James

Willard N. James

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Project Title:

EXPERIMENTS WITH THE APPLICATIONS OF THE AUDIO-VISUAL AND AUTOMATIC DEVICES TO THE TEACHING OF FRENCH.

In May 1960, the principal investigator presented a Master's thesis which consisted of 250 frames of programmed teaching in French phonetics. The investigator was interested in techniques of programming and wished to pursue her research in that field. She used her thesis as a pilot study, and was able to find interested Hollins students who volunteered to be tested on the program. Since their reaction was so enthusiastic and the error rate was reasonably low, it appeared that, with extensive rewrite, this initial program could serve as the nucleus of a course in French Phonetics.

It was the intention of the investigator to use a programmed French II course as a means of developing and testing programming techniques, and the course was tentatively based on a study of French culture. The French Culture program, however, proved to be such a long-range project, that only the rough draft was developed. This program would require another year's work at least before it is ready for a preliminary testing. The Phonetics course, on the other hand, was very popular and lent itself well to recently developed and very promising techniques of language programming. Because of its narrower scope, it proved to be a programming unit which could be easily rewritten and tested a number of times. For these reasons, the principal investigator chose to use the French Phonetics as a programmed course to be given to students in their second year of French.

During the summer of 1960, the investigator expanded the initial 250 frames to a course of 1000 frames, the first draft of which was tested on volunteers from the French Institute held at Hollins College during that summer. Their comments were very useful in developing further techniques which facilitated learning and recall. These techniques were incorporated into successive versions. It was also administered to a group of high school students who had no previous acquaintance with the French language. It was found that they were capable of mastering the material presented, but were unable to perceive its relevance since they had no immediate application for it.

In the fall of 1960, the program was ready to be tested on students. Since, however, it was an experimental program, it was impossible to expect students to take it as a regular course, and only students who volunteered could be secured. In order for the investigator to get as many testings and rewrites as possible and to benefit by the reactions of many subjects, successive testings were conducted with students from Beginning and Second Year

French, graduate students, and even adults with little or no knowledge of the language. After a group had completed the course, a statistical analysis of errors and a compiled list of comments were made available to the principal investigator, who then used them to perfect her techniques and develop new ones. With each rewrite, every effort was made to reduce the error rate. The principal investigator enlisted the help of other programmers and several linguists and psychologists, in particular Dr. Maurice W. Sullivan, Director of Research in Verbal Behavior, Neil Sullivan, Director of Research in Methodology, both of the Britannica Center for Studies in Learning and Motivation, and Miss Cynthia Dee Buchanan, Instructor in Linguistics at Hollins College. Several programmers served as critics, worked on the first rewrite, and later, on the last two rewrites.

Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, Inc. found the course suitable for publication in the spring of 1961.

The principal investigator now plans to continue her work in the field of programming and to develop a course for the programmed teaching of French I and French II, to be followed by a programmed course in French Civilization. The French Phonetics course was one of the first courses in the field of languages to be completed, and many of the techniques that the principal investigator initiated and developed were used and further developed by other programmers in various related programs.

The principal investigator developed her program following three main principles of teaching:

1) Participation

The student is never a passive recipient. He has to participate actively and thus is kept constantly attentive. The material is broken into small steps or frames, and a response is elicited from the student in each frame. This response may be oral or written, or both. The student constructs his own responses from the information given in the frame.

2) Reinforcement

Immediate reinforcement is given to the student after each response. After each step, he receives immediate reinforcing knowledge of results when he uncovers the correct answer which follows each frame.

3) Progression

The material is not broken up into a series of chapters or units that the student must fit together. Each frame is a building unit which adds a small amount of information to what has already been presented. The program is designed for a student who has no initial knowledge of the subject. The student is allowed to proceed step by step at his own pace.

The French Phonetics course consists of a printed textbook and a tape. The student checks his oral responses with his tape player and his written responses with the programmed text. The oral part of the course is recorded on the tape. When the student sees a star (*), he turns on his tape player by means of a pedal or button, and hears a French sound, word, or phrase which is spoken twice. After the second time, he stops his tape player and continues with the written material in his book until he sees the next star. The student always repeats each sound, word, or phrase that he hears and pronounces every French word that he writes. The sounds of French are contrasted with English sounds and with each other. The student is taught to recognize and to produce the French vowels and consonants; accurate discrimination is insured by the use of phonetic symbols. Drills on pronunciation and transcription increase the student's familiarity with each new sound. After the student has learned to recognize and to produce a sound, he is taught the different ways in which this sound may be represented or "spelled". When he has learned to produce all of the sounds, he studies syllabication, stress, elision, liaison, and loss of the weak vowel in rapid speech.

The program has given excellent results when used along with a first-course in French, and as a review of French sounds for students who have already had one or two more years of French. It can also be used as an independent First Course in French Phonetics for French majors, or to train FLES teachers in the sounds of French.